

II.

The History of a singular Affection of the Action of the Heart, terminating favourably.

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AS an instance of the difficulty of forming a just prognostic, as well as of the surprising efforts of nature, the following extraordinary case may not be unworthy of the attention of medical practitioners.

Miss L——, æt. 10. towards the end of September 1785, was attacked with a rash, which at that time was frequent in this city. It so nearly resembled the measles, that one would be apt to mistake the two disorders for each other. This rash, resembling the measles in the appearance of the eruption, was evidently contagious; or, at least, so generally attacked all the children of the families where it appeared, that I cannot help looking on it

as such. The running from the eyes and nose was considerable; the feverish symptoms as great as is usual in measles; and the course nearly the same. The chief distinguishing character that I could perceive, was the absence of cough or pulmonic affection. As this, however, is but a negative one, it may be esteemed as no valid objection to the supposition of its being measles. But a convincing proof of the contrary is, that the children of the family here alluded to, who were attacked with it, had the measles long before; and the only child who had them not, escaped taking this.

The patient here mentioned had it so mildly, that medicines were thought unnecessary. In about a fortnight, however, from the commencement of the rash, and some days after returning to her usual exercise and diet, she complained of a swelling of the face; which (as I had not seen her for some days) I imagined might have been an inflammatory attack from cold; and accordingly ordered a dose of Glauber's salts, which had little or no effect in reducing it. At my next visit I perceived that the swelling was manifestly anasarcaous,

farcous, and that the legs were also affected in a similar manner; but, as I was informed, subsequent to the face. I accordingly prescribed the usual diuretics, avoiding those which might injure the stomach (already much weakened), such as squills, &c. Those that in such cases I have found most frequently efficacious, are spir. nitr. dulcis, and infus. bacc. juniperi, which have rather the effect of promoting the appetite than otherwise. These, however, had scarce any effect. On the contrary, the breathing became more laboured; and the following extraordinary circumstance was noticed:—the child mentioned a considerable palpitation of the heart; but whether it occurred before or after the dropical symptoms took place, she could not tell.

On examining, I perceived an uncommon pulsation on the left side, at the joining of the fifth and sixth ribs with the sternum. The ribs in the region of it were considerably elevated; and it communicated so forcible a stroke to the hand when laid on the part, that, taking every circumstance into consideration, I could not avoid concluding it to

proceed from an aneurifmal affection of the heart, or fome of the large veffels at or near their origin. The pulse, at the wriſt, was ſmall, tremulous, intermitting, and every way irregular. Alarmed at this diſcovery, I deſired that other aſſiſtance ſhould be called in.

Two phyſicians of eminence accordingly examined the patient ; and with little heſitation concurred in the opinion I had adopted, and concluded that medicines of any kind muſt be ineffectual.

I muſt here obſerve, that the pulſation alluded to was at no time abſent, or leſs in degree. Reckoning from the firſt dropſical appearance, ſhe had been ill, at this time, about three weeks ; was unable to lie down in bed ; the reſpiration very laborious, and conſtantly moaning. From the oppreſſion and deſpondence of recovery, ſhe anxiously expected death.

In this ſituation, directions were given to ſupport her with wine ; and, in ſhort, to indulge her in any reaſonable deſire. I then diſcontinued my attendance, daily expecting to hear of her death ; but was aſtoniſhed when I was informed, in a ſhort time after,
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that her appetite daily mended ; a very considerable discharge by urine, which was heretofore scanty, took place ; and in less than a fortnight from my last visit, she was perfectly restored to health.

I shall conclude, by making a few observations on the above case. And first, with respect to its nature, I shall endeavour to make some conjecture.

As to its being dropfical in part, there can be no doubt ; but whether the accumulation of water was the cause or the consequence of the extraordinary affection of the heart, may be worth inquiring. In this we would be much assisted, if it could be ascertained which was the first symptom, that of the heart, or the dropfical appearance. But this was impossible, from the inattentive age of the patient ; though its pulsation and situation may warrant any person in concluding (if any thing less than ocular demonstration may be depended on), that it must be an aneurismal affection of the heart or large vessels. But, on the contrary, we must allow, that the event renders such a conjecture improbable ; as we know of no instances where aneurisms
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of large vessels have terminated favourably, either by art or nature. As to water in the thorax or pericardium producing such a symptom, it is more than I find in any author. All those whom I have consulted, mention the “*pulsus exilis, tremulus**,” &c. And, indeed, their observations are perfectly consonant to what, reasoning *à priori*, we would expect; for water, contained in the thorax, pericardium, &c. must, we would suppose, suffocate the motion of the heart in proportion to the quantity contained. In this case, however, the pulsation was as strong as I have ever felt it in any case of confirmed aneurism. This singularity has induced me to be thus prolix; and to request you would insert it, if worthy a place, in your very useful commentaries, as affording a proper caution to others, with respect to the prognosis, at least in similar cases.

* *Vide* Sauvage, de Hydrothorace.

